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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 7 September 1976, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. JOEWONO (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

CONVENING OF A CONFERENCE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN, summarizing the discussions that had taken place at the 31st and 32nd meetings of the Committee and at the informal meeting held on 11 May 1976, drew attention to the letter from the Chairman dated 10 February 1976 addressed to the littoral and hinterland States and the replies thereto (Conference room papers 1/76 and Add.1 and 2/76) and to the letter from the Chairman dated 19 May 1976 addressed to the other great Powers and major maritime users of the Indian Ocean and the replies thereto (Conference room paper 3/76 and Add.1). Little progress had been made so far and he appealed to members to endeavour to complete the work entrusted to the Committee.

2. Mr. VANDERGERT (Sri Lanka) said that one of the main concerns of the Committee during the past two years had been the convening of a conference on the Indian Ocean, on which there was agreement in principle among the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean. The convening of such a conference had also been supported by the Fifth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries held recently at Colombo.

3. His delegation, however, was not satisfied with the progress that had been made either in the Committee or in the larger group of littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean. There was general agreement that the ultimate aim of the conference should be the adoption of an international convention which would give legal effect to the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. With regard to the practical aspects of holding such a conference, his delegation noted that the Government of Iraq had offered to act as host to the conference if it were to be held in 1977, that a similar offer had been made by the Government of Mauritius, and that the Government of Madagascar had offered to serve as host country for a first session at the expert level. His delegation wished to thank those Governments for their gracious gestures.

4. Between the end result of the conference and the discussions concerning the practical aspects of holding it, however, there was a vast area of uncharted territory. What was therefore required was a clearly defined and precisely determined programme of action - preferably one linked to a specific time-frame - which would enable the Committee to attain its ultimate aim. His delegation had no precise answers as to what form such a programme of action should take or what the time-table should be, and felt it was a matter that could best be discussed and decided on at the current session of the Committee. It had, however, one preliminary suggestion. One of the priority items before the Committee was the definition of terms. Despite the preliminary work done by various delegations, including those of Australia and Pakistan, no agreement had been reached on the matter and presumably it could be left to the conference itself. It would appear, however, that some basic agreement on at least one definition, namely, that of littoral and hinterland States, was essential prior to the conference.

(Mr. Vandergert, Sri Lanka)

5. In the past few years, every resolution adopted by the Committee had deplored the fact that certain great Powers and certain major maritime users of the Indian Ocean had not co-operated with the littoral and hinterland States and the Committee in the consultations held regarding the convening of a conference. He wished to emphasize that his delegation's observations did not apply to the People's Republic of China or to Japan, which had actively participated in the work of the Committee from its inception, nor to one or two other major maritime States which had expressed their willingness to co-operate. The other great Powers and major maritime users had, however, stated that, before they could associate themselves with arrangements for a conference, the littoral and hinterland States should first agree among themselves on the fundamental issues underlying the conference.

6. In order to avoid such criticisms, the Committee should begin work immediately on devising a clear-cut programme of action. It could no longer afford the luxury of procrastination because, as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka had stated at the Fifth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, the implementation of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace had assumed a new urgency. The Fifth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries itself had expressed concern that, as a result of recent developments, the Indian Ocean could become the main focus of great Power rivalry in Asia. Such a development would lead to tension and conflict in the area through growing competition among the great Powers for naval superiority. In the circumstances, it was imperative that the Declaration should be implemented with the least possible delay as a contribution to international peace and security.

7. Mr. OXLEY (Australia), noting that the Committee's work was impeded because delegations also had to attend the current session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, proposed that the Committee should postpone its meetings until the following week and, in the meantime, study the suggestion put forward by the representative of Sri Lanka.

8. Mr. MULYE (India) and Mr. VANDERGERT (Sri Lanka) supported that proposal.

9. The CHAIRMAN said that, if there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the proposal by the representative of Australia.

10. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.